

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017*

**Remarks on Signing a Memorandum on Combatting the National Drug Demand and Opioid Crisis**

*October 26, 2017*

Thank you, Melania, for your moving words and for your devotion—I mean, it's a very deep devotion, I can tell you that—to our Nation and its children.

Thank you also to Members of Congress, my Cabinet, Governors, Members of Congress, State, local leaders, first responders, and health care professionals gathered here today. We have some truly incredible people in this room—that I can tell you.

Most importantly, we acknowledge the families present who have lost a cherished loved one. As you all know from personal experience, families, communities, and citizens across our country are currently dealing with the worst drug crisis in American history and even, if you really think about it, world history. This is all throughout the world. The fact is, this is a worldwide problem.

This crisis of drug use, addiction, and overdose deaths in many years, it's just been so long in the making. Addressing it will require all of our effort, and it will require us to confront the crisis in all of its very real complexity.

Last year, we lost at least 64,000 Americans to overdoses. That's 175 lost American lives per day. That's seven lost lives per hour in our country. Drug overdoses are now the leading cause of unintentional death in the United States by far. More people are dying from drug overdoses today than from gun homicides and motor vehicles combined. Think of it: motor vehicle crashes, gun homicides, more people by far from drug overdoses.

These overdoses are driven by a massive increase in addiction to prescription painkillers, heroin, and other opioids. Last year, almost 1 million Americans used heroin, and more than 11 million abused prescription opioids. The United States is by far the largest consumer of these drugs, using more opioid pills per person than any other country by far in the world. Opioid overdose deaths have quadrupled since 1999 and now account for the majority of fatal drug overdoses. Who would have thought?

No part of our society—not young or old, rich or poor, urban or rural—has been spared this plague of drug addiction and this horrible, horrible situation that's taken place with opioids. In West Virginia—a truly great State, great people—there is a hospital nursery where one in every five babies spends its first days in agony. Because these precious babies were exposed to opioids or other drugs in the womb, they endure nausea, pain, anxiety, sleeplessness, and trouble in eating, just the same as adults undergoing detox. Some of these children will likely lose one or both of their parents to drug addiction and overdose. They will join the growing ranks of America's opioid orphans. Such beautiful, beautiful babies.

Beyond the shocking death toll, the terrible measure of the opioid crisis includes the families ripped apart and, for many communities, a generation of lost potential and opportunity. This epidemic is a national health emergency, unlike many of us—we've seen, and—what we've seen in our lifetimes. Nobody has seen anything like what's going on now.

As Americans, we cannot allow this to continue. It is time to liberate our communities from this scourge of drug addiction. Never been this way. We can be the generation that ends the opioid epidemic. We can do it. We can do it.

That is why, effective today, my administration is officially declaring the opioid crisis a national public health emergency under Federal law, and why I am directing all executive agencies to use every appropriate emergency authority to fight the opioid crisis. This marks a critical step in confronting the extraordinary challenge that we face.

As part of this emergency response, we will announce a new policy to overcome a restrictive 1970s-era rule that prevents States from providing care at certain treatment facilities with more than 16 beds for those suffering from drug addiction.

A number of States have reached out to us asking for relief, and you should expect to see approvals that will unlock treatment for people in need. And those approvals will come very, very fast. Not like in the past—very, very quickly.

Ending the epidemic will require mobilization of government, local communities, and private organizations. It will require the resolve of our entire country. The scale of this crisis of addiction is why, soon after coming into office, I convened a Presidential Commission, headed by Governor Chris Christie, that has consulted with experts across America to listen, to learn, and report back on potential solutions.

We await the final report, which will come in next week. And I know some of the report has already been seen, because I want to see it as quickly as possible. And some of the things that they are recommending are commonsense, but very, very important. And they're going to have a tremendous impact, believe me, tremendous impact.

Today I will detail many of these aggressive steps with my administration, which we've already taken. After we review and evaluate the Commission's findings, I will quickly move to implement approximate and appropriate recommendations.

But I want the American people to know: The Federal Government is aggressively fighting the opioid epidemic on all fronts. We're working with doctors and medical professionals to implement best practices for safe opioid prescribing, and we will do something very, very special. We are requiring federally employed prescribers to receive, finally, special training.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has launched a prescription awareness campaign to put faces on the danger of opioid abuse.

I want to acknowledge CVS Caremark for announcing last month that it will limit certain first-time opioid prescriptions to 7-day supplies, among other important reforms. And I encourage other companies to do their part to help to stop this epidemic.

The FDA is now requiring drug companies that manufacture prescription opioids to provide more training to prescribers and to help prevent abuse and addiction, and has requested that one especially high-risk opioid be withdrawn from the market immediately. We are requiring that a specific opioid, which is truly evil, be taken off the market immediately.

The U.S. Postal Service and the Department of Homeland Security are strengthening the inspection of packages coming into our country to hold back the flood of cheap and deadly fentanyl, a synthetic opioid manufactured in China and 50 times stronger than heroin.

And in 2 weeks, I will be in China with President Xi, and I will mention this as a top priority. And he will do something about it. I am also pleased to report that for the first time, the Department of Justice has indicated [indicted]<sup>\*</sup> major Chinese drug traffickers for distributing, and they have really put very, very strong clamps on them. They've indicted them, the drug traffickers, for distributing fentanyl into the United States. So, Jeff, thank you very much. Good job. Good job.

And they've been indicted, and we're not going to forget about them, believe me. They are doing tremendous harm to our country. The Justice Department is aggressively and, really, valiantly pursuing those who illegally prescribe and traffic in opioids, both in our communities and on the internet.

And I will be looking at the potential of the Federal Government bringing major lawsuits against bad actors. What they have and what they're doing to our people is unheard of. We will be bringing some very major lawsuits against people and against companies that are hurting our people. And that will start taking place pretty soon.

We're also supporting first responders' and medical professionals' access to the tools they need to prevent deaths through lifesaving overdose medications.

At my direction, the National Institute of Health, headed up by Francis Collins, has taken the first steps of an ambitious public-private partnership with pharmaceutical companies to develop nonaddictive painkillers and new treatments for addiction and overdose. So important.

I will be pushing the concept of nonaddictive painkillers very, very hard. We have to come up with that solution. We give away billions and billions of dollars a year, and we're going to be spending lots of money on coming up with a nonaddictive solution.

We will be asking Dr. Collins and the NIH for substantial resources in the fight against drug addiction. One of the things our administration will be doing is a massive advertising campaign to get people, especially children, not to want to take drugs in the first place, because they will see the devastation and the ruination it causes to people and people's lives.

Watch what happens, if we do our jobs, how the number of drug users and the addicted will start to tumble downward over a period of years. It will be a beautiful thing to see.

I learned, myself—I had a brother, Fred—great guy, best looking guy, best personality—much better than mine. [Laughter] But he had a problem. He had a problem with alcohol, and he would tell me: "Don't drink. Don't drink." He was substantially older, and I listened to him, and I respected, but he would constantly tell me, don't drink. He'd also add, don't smoke. But he would say it over and over and over again.

And to this day, I've never had a drink. And I have no longing for it. I have no interest in it. To this day, I've never had a cigarette. Don't worry, those are only two of my good things. I don't want to tell you about the bad things. [Laughter] There's plenty of bad things too.

But he really helped me. I had somebody that guided me, and he had a very, very, very tough life because of alcohol—believe me, very, very tough, tough life. He was a strong guy, but it was a tough, tough thing that he was going through. But I learned because of Fred. I learned.

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<sup>\*</sup> White House correction.

And that's what I think is so important. This was an idea that I had, where if we can teach young people not to take drugs—just not to take them. When I see friends of mine that are having difficulty with not having that drink at dinner, where it's literally almost impossible for them to stop, I say to myself—I can't even understand it—why would that be difficult? But we understand why it is difficult.

The fact is, if we can teach young people—and people, generally—not to start, it's really, really easy not to take them. And I think that's going to end up being our most important thing. Really tough, really big, really great advertising, so we get to people before they start, so they don't have to go through the problems of what people are going through. [Applause] Thank you.

We are already distributing nearly \$1 billion in grants for addiction prevention and treatment, and over \$50 million dollars to support law enforcement programs that assist those facing prison and facing addiction.

We have also launched an \$81 million partnership to research better pain management techniques for our incredible veterans. And soon—[applause]—and, by the way, Secretary Shulkin is here. You have done an incredible job for our veterans in a very short period of time. And soon, HHS will launch a Task Force to develop and update best practices for pain management across the Federal Government.

I am urging all Americans to help fight this opioid epidemic and the broader issue of drug addiction by participating in the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day this Saturday. When you can safely turn in these dangerous and horrible drugs for disposal, that will be a wonderful, wonderful period of time for you.

All of these actions are important parts of my administration's larger effort to confront the drug addiction crisis in America and confront it head on, straight on—strong. We're going to do it. We're going to do it.

For too long, we have allowed drugs to ravage American homes, cities, and towns. We owe it to our children and to our country to do everything in our power to address this national shame and this human tragedy.

We must stop the flow of all types of illegal drugs into our communities. For too long, dangerous criminal cartels have been allowed to infiltrate and spread throughout our Nation. An astonishing 90 percent of the heroin in America comes from south of the border, where we will be building a wall which will greatly help in this problem. It will have a great impact. My administration is dedicated to enforcing our immigration laws, defending our maritime security, and securing our borders.

We also have to work with other countries to stop these drugs where they originate. We have no choice. We have to work with others, we have to get together, because they have similar problems to what we have. Some countries have bigger problems than we have. Whether that country is China, whether it's a country in Latin America, it makes no difference. We're going to be working with all of them. We're taking the fight directly to the criminals in places that they're producing this poison.

Here in America, we are once again enforcing the law, breaking up gangs and distribution networks, and arresting criminals who peddle dangerous drugs to our youth.

In addition, we understand the need to confront reality, right smack in the face, that millions of our fellow citizens are already addicted. That's the reality. We want them to get

help they need. We have no choice but to help these people that are hooked and are suffering, so they can recover and rebuild their lives with their families.

We're committed to pursuing innovative approaches that have been proven to work, like drug courts. Our efforts will be based on sound metrics and guided by evidence and guided by results. This includes making addiction treatment available to those in prison and to help them eventually reenter society as productive and law-abiding citizens.

Finally, we must adopt the most commonsense solution of all: to prevent our citizens from becoming addicted to drugs in the first place. We must and are focusing so much of our effort on drug demand reduction. We must confront the culture of drug abuse head-on to reduce demand for dangerous narcotics. Every person who buys illicit drugs here in America should know that they are risking their futures, their families, and even their lives. And every American should know that if they purchase illegal drugs, they are helping to finance some of the most violent, cruel, and ruthless organizations anywhere in the world. Illegal drug use is not a victimless crime. There is nothing admirable, positive, or socially desirable about it. There is nothing desirable about drugs. They're bad.

We want the next generation of young Americans to know the blessings of a drug-free life. In this enormous struggle against drug addiction, an opioid epidemic—it really is that; it is an epidemic—our greatest hope is the same as it has always been. Through every trial, America has encountered throughout our history, the spirit of our people and the strength of our character, we win. Each of us has a responsibility to this effort. We have a total responsibility to ourselves, to our family, to our country, including those who are struggling with this addiction.

Each of us is responsible to look out for our loved ones, our communities, our children, our neighbors, and our own health. Almost every American has witnessed the horrors of addiction, whether it's through their own struggle or through the struggle of a friend, a coworker, a neighbor or, frankly, a family member. Our current addiction crisis, and especially the epidemic of opioid deaths, will get worse before it gets better. But get better it will. It will take many years and even decades to address this scourge in our society, but we must start in earnest now to combat national health emergency.

We are inspired by the stories of everyday heroes who pull their communities from the depths of despair through leadership and through love.

Fire Chief Dan Goonan of New Hampshire—great State—runs a program, Safe Station, which allows drug-dependent residents to seek help at fire stations at any time.

Jesse and Cyndi Swafford of Dayton, Ohio, have provided a loving, stable home to children affected by the opioid crisis.

I am calling on every American to join the ranks of guardian angels like Chief Goonan and the Swaffords, who help lift up the people of our great Nation.

Together, we will care for our citizens, our children, and our orphans, and our—and you know what I'm going to say—our foster youth. So many. So many. But we're going to lift them up, and we're going to take care of them. We will work to strengthen vulnerable families and communities, and we will help to build and grow a stronger, healthier, and drug-free society.

Together, we will face this challenge as a national family with conviction, with unity, and with a commitment to love and support our neighbors in times of dire need. Working together, we will defeat this opioid epidemic. It will be defeated. We will free our Nation from the terrible affliction of drug abuse. And yes, we will overcome addiction in America. We are going

to overcome addiction in America. We have fought and won many battles and many wars before, and we will win again.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America. Thank you.

*[At this point, the President greeted and shook hands with participants.]*

Thank you. So, this is very important: "Combatting the National Drug Demand and Opioid Crisis." Right? So important. We will win, right?

*Dayton, OH, resident Kalib Swafford.* Yes.

*[The President signed the memorandum.]*

*The President.* Who wants the pen?

*[The President handed the pen to Kalib.]*

Should we give one, maybe—Chris Christie? Where is he? Come on over here.

*[The President handed a second pen to Gov. Christopher J. Christie of New Jersey.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:26 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Xiaobing Yan and Jian Zhang, Chinese nationals indicted by the U.S. Department of Justice for drug trafficking; Attorney General Jefferson B. Sessions III; and Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Drug demand and opioid crisis, national, efforts to combat, signing the memorandum.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Christie, Christopher J.; Collins, Francis S.; Goonan, Daniel A.; Jian Zhang; Sessions, Jefferson B., III; Shulkin, David J.; Swafford, Cynthia; Swafford, Jesse; Swafford, Kalib; Trump, Melania; Xi Jinping; Xiaobing Yan.

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